

Elusive Shadows

by mermaidbyheart

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Summary: "You don't need to know my name in order to play; you just need to know the rules. Didn't I tell you? We're going to play a game."

1. Chapter 1

****Chapter 1: Gone**

>

It was Friday and late in the evening. The four families had gathered together for a dinner again. They had this tradition to always gather together on Friday evenings. This time they were at the Doves house.

Emma and Ash were living at Emma's old house and had two beautiful daughters at the age of 14 - Serena and Louise. Louise was like a replica of Emma while Serena was just like her father, taking not only his looks, but also his love for horses. Emma was working like a lawyer, and Ash owned a big farm with horse stables and it turned out everything that included horses was a really well-paired thing. Emma's parents had moved to a small house at the other side of the town, and even though they reassured Emma like about a hundred times it was perfect, she knew they missed their old house.

Eliot had married Kim, who had changed a lot. She still loved fashion magazines and shopping maybe a little too much, but she was now a loving wife, and was working as some famous fashion designer's assistant. She and Eliot had a 4-year-old daughter called Rose and they loved being parents. They often visited Cleo and Emma, but never showed up at the Friday dinners, because they were always "busy" with something. The truth was they knew it was Emma, Cleo and they friends' thing and respecting that really a lot, they didn't want to disturb them.

Cleo and Lewis were the first to arrive for the traditional dinner

along with their 15-year-old son Jasper. Jasper was blond like his father, but had his mother's eyes and her character. Cleo was working at the Marine Park and was promoted to a Dolphin Trainer, and Lewis was working there too, but as a marine biologist. Cleo's Dolphine show had become the most popular show in the whole world and now people from all different countries were coming to see it. It was exhausting, but Cleo loved her job. She was happy to work with her husband at the same place and their salaries were big enough to cover their bills and their needs.

The Benjamin family was the second to come leaving the Bennetts to be the last. Will and Bella had a 16-year-old son named Peter and Rikki and Zane had a daughter at the same age as Peter called Julie. Peter had taken his dad's looks and passion for diving. Will actually had renewed his diving career and was now a successful diver with a couple of champion titles that helped him earn good money and take care of his family. Bella was a successful singer at "Rikki's" and she and the group had signed contract with one of the big music companies (thanks to Zane's help and his connections), coming up with more and more albums. Thanks to Rikki and Zane's hard work, "Rikki's" had turned out to be the most successful cafe not only at the Gold Coast, but in Sydney too and at the whole Australia itself. Their daughter Julie was just like her mother, inside and out. She had her mother's blond curly hair and blue eyes, making her as beautiful as Rikki, and most of all she had Rikki's strength and stubbornness (which was driving her dad crazy most of the times).

Serena, Louise and Julie were mermaids, just like their mothers, but Peter and Jasper only had their mother's powers. That's why they were a bit jealous of the girls, because they loved the ocean just as much and they wished they would be able to swim for ages like their mothers and the girls. However they managed to hide that pretty well. Actually, though they'd never admit, Jasper had a crush on Serena and Peter couldn't keep his eyes off Julie.

The dinner went like usual: everybody was talking about mermaid stuff, then school stuff, then the typical questions followed like who was doing what lately and how the things with their lives are. The four families were like one big family and were telling each other everything.

After the dinner the talks were moved from the dining room to the living room and lasted a few hours, until Emma noticed it was going late and reminded all the children that they had school the following day. They groaned.

"It was just starting to get interesting." Serena murmured breaking the conversation she, Louise and Julie was having.

"Your mother's right, sweetie." Cleo told her gently. "It is late."

Cleo, Bella and Rikki stood up from the couch, followed by their husbands. Numerous hugs followed, because of everybody hugging everybody and finally the McCartneys, the Bennetts and the Benjamins left the Doves house.

* * *

><p>"I didn't think I'd ever say that, but I like these Friday

dinners." Rikki told Zane, while they were driving to their house.<p>

Julie was at the backseat writing a message from her phone.

"Yeah, me too. It's a good way to catch up with everything that's going on." Zane nodded.

Rikki turned to look at her daughter and smirked.

"Who are you chatting with?"

Julie lifted her head to look at her mother.

"No one interesting." She said and looked down again.

"So it's a boy, then." Rikki sated.

Her daughter didn't responded to that, nor she lifted her head again, but red color rushed to her cheeks and gave her up.

"Who is he?" Rikki asked. "Anyone we know?"

"No." Julie said shortly, but her mother didn't bought the lie.

"It's Peter isn't it?" She asked.

That's when Zane talked up.

"Answer your mother, Julie." He said with calm voice, taking a glance at her from the mirror for back sight.

"Ok, fine, it's Peter." She murmured. "But don't try anything on him."

Rikki smirked.

"I won't, but your dad's other thing."

Zane shot her a look.

"It turns out Peter took his father's taste for girls too, huh? What is it with all the Benjamin boys that they always fancy the wrong girls?!" He commented and Rikki's smile vanished immediately.

Her dad's comment made Julie shot her head up.

"What do you mean Peter took his father's taste for girls?"

"Nothing." Rikki said quickly before Zane could even open his mouth. "Your dad was just joking."

"But it's true isn't it?" Zane said giving shooting Rikki a look.

She sighed.

"I thought you were over that."

"I was." Zane said without thinking, but then he quickly covered his mistake. "I mean I _am_. I just wanted Julie to know thatâ€|"

"That what?" Rikki interrupted him. "That her dad can't control his jealousy and imagined something that's impossible?!"

Zane didn't answer to that. The remain of the drive was silent. When they arrived home Julie went straight into her room and Rikki and Zane went to their bedroom, but it could be heard easily they were arguing.

* * *

><p>At the Doves house, Serena and Louise were helping their parents to clean up.<p>

"It's nice when we're all gathering together, but not so nice when we do it here and we have to clean up after that." Ash commented jokingly.

"Yeah, well, that's why we're taking turns." Emma said giving her husband a smile.

"You know what? I'm beaten up. Let's leave the rest for tomorrow." He told his wife.

"No, I'll finish here, you go to bed." Emma said gently.

"Fine." He said, putting the plate he was holding in the dishwasher.

After exchanging "Good Night"s with his two daughters he kissed Emma (Serena and Louise pretended they were puking behind their parents' backs, but they were actually happy for them) and went upstairs.

"Girls, you two should head to your beds too." Emma told them. "Just stop doing what you're doing, wash your teeth and go to bed."

The girls rolled their eyes.

"Ok, mom." They said heading lazily upstairs.

Emma only rolled her eyes and smiled. She loved these three people more than her life.

* * *

><p>At the McCartney's house Cleo and Lewis had to prepare for the following day and Jasper went in his room, but instead of getting some sleep, he preffered playing some coputer games on his laptop.<p>

"Tomorrow is going to be a big day." Cleo told her husband.

"Yeah, another bunch of screaming people wanting to see your show." Lewis commented.

"You're saying it as if it's something bad." Cleo frowned.

"It's not bad. But I just hope they will be there only to watch the dolphins tomorrow."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing."

"Are you...jealous or something?" Cleo started laughing.

"Nope." He lied.

"Liar!" She accused him and then gave him a kiss. "Don't worry." She whispered in his ear. "They can stare at me as much as they want. But there's only one _I_ can stare at." And she leaned to kiss him again...

"Good to know." He commented before picking her up and carrying her to their bed.

* * *

><p>At the Benjamin's house Peter had took his place in front of the TV, sitting next to his parents. Still, he couldn't get his eyes off his phone, and was checking it at every few minutes, occasionally writing something short to someone. Will and Bella noticed that and his father joked.<p>

"Is this some girl you're chatting with, so enthusiastically?"

Peter didn't answer, but his cheeks went bright red. His mother smiled.

"I saw the way you were looking at Julie tonight, by the way." She said softly. "You like her, don't you?"

"So what if I do?" He bit her.

"Nothing. I just think it's sweet." She answered lovingly.

"Mom!" He rolled his eyes, his cheeks becoming even redder.

"I'm sorry, I'll zip my mouth." She smirked and they went back to watching the movie.

* * *

><p>The next morning Julie walked into the kitchen and saw her father making breakfast.<p>

"Good morning, dad." She said.

"Good morning, sweetheart. Did you sleep well?"

"Yeah."

"I think the breakfast's ready. Why don't you go wake up your mom?"

"Fine." Julie groaned and went upstairs.

She knocked on the door of her parents' room, but when she didn't get an answer she pushed it open.

"Mom? Are you awake?"

She looked around, but the room was turned upside down and was empty. So was the bathroom. "Weird", Julie thought when something caught her attention and she leaned to take it. She then recognized it and ran downstairs.

"Dad, something's wrong. Mom's not upstairs and your bedroom and the bathroom are a complete mess. And...I found this." She stretched her hand showing her father the silver locket with the red gem stone she had found in the bathroom.

"What?!" Zane grabbed the locket and ran upstairs.

Julie could hear him calling her mother's name without getting any response at all.

He ran frantically from one room to another, but Rikki wasn't there. In his desperation and frustration he threw the locket against the wall causing it open while falling down. He reached and grabbed it. In there instead of the photo he found a small piece of paper. He pulled it to read what was written on it. It said only "_Help_". He then ran back downstairs and grabbed his phone from the kitchen table, dialing Rikki's number. Her voicemail was on and he started panicking.

"Julie, get your things, I'll take you to your aunt Cleo and uncle Lewis, ok?!"

"Dad, what's going on?" She asked, getting worried too.

"Don't ask questions, just do as I say!"

She ran upstairs to get her things. Zane grabbed his keys and once Julie was ready they got in the car and drove off. When they got to their destination, Zane jumped out and rang at the door bell. Cleo opened the door and it seemed she had just woke up.

"Zane, for goodness sake it's six in the morning!" She groaned while yawning.

"Cleo, I'm sorry, I know it's early but Rikki's gone and-"

"What?" Cleo's eyes suddenly went wide open when he said that. "What do you mean she's _gone_?"

"Look, I don't have time to explain but can Julie stay with while I'm looking for her mother?"

"Of course!" Cleo said and she gently pulled Julie inside and turned to look at Zane. "Are you sure you don't need any help? I can wake up Lewis."

"No, thanks but, no." Zane nodded. "Oh, and take this." He gave Cleo the locket with the note. "I found it in the bathroom, it's the only thing left from her. Keep it safe, while I'm searching for Rikki, it

might be an important clue to what happened with her." He said, while getting into the car and he drove off into the light of the sunrise.

This was the last time anybody saw him.

2. Chapter 2

****Chapter 2:****

1 year laterâ€¦****

Julie turned in her bed to look through the window and not let anyone see she hadn't got any sleep last night. Her blue eyes were wandering somewhere at the sky and a sigh escaped her lips. She heard the door open and someone coming in.

"Julie, honey, it's time to get up for school." She heard her aunt say to her gently.

She turned around pretending she had just woken up.

"Ok, Auntie Cleo." She answered and slid out of the covers.

She went to the bathroom to comb her hair and put some lip-gloss (the only make-up except lipstick she ever put on) and to wash her face. She looked at her reflection in the mirror and for a second, just for a split second she thought she saw her mother. Julie quickly shook her head getting rid of that thought. She tried to convince herself that she had imagined that because of the constant reminding to her of everybody how much she looked like her mother. She walked out of the bathroom, put the first shorts and tank top she found and ran downstairs, pulling her hair up in a ponytail along the way.

When she entered the kitchen she saw her aunt and uncle were already there along with Jasper who was eating pancakes. Julie, who wasn't so hungry, just grabbed one apple from the table and took a bite, taking the free chair next to her uncle.

Cleo and Lewis silently exchanged meaningful looks. Ever since Rikki and Zane had disappeared Julie was living in their house. A year had passed and they couldn't help but notice how distant Julie was growing more and more practically almost every day. Not that she didn't love them or their house; she just missed her parents and needed them both more than ever. She never talked much, especially if someone tried to bring up the topic concerning her feelings. It may not have been every time because of the same reason, like for example that she was getting angry or annoyed or didn't have anything to say, but all in all she just didn't want to talk about what was going in her mind and that was that. Her reaction was always quickly changing the topic, just starting to talk about everything else that occurred to her.

When they finished eating their breakfast, Julie and Jasper took their bags and went out.

Reaching their school they saw Serena, Louise and Peter waiting for them. Serena and Louise included Julie in their conversation and Peter and Jasper fell in a deep conversation about things like sport,

cars and motorcycles, computer games and even boats.

Julie quickly zoned out again, not listening to Serena and Louise, and was now quietly staring at ocean that could be seen from the school yard because of the beach being not too far from the school. She wished she could sneak out for she desperately needed a swim. Sighing quietly to herself she followed the others into the classroom.

Louise and Serena immediately found two empty seats and hurried to take them. Julie took the empty seat at the table in front of theirs. She pulled her book out of her bag, when she felt someone sitting beside her and turned to look who it was. It turned out it was Peter.

"Jules, are you ok?" He asked her concerned. "I noticed the way you zoned out of your conversation with the girls. Is there something going on?"

"It's fine, nothing's going on." She said annoyed and with tone that clearly ended the topic.

The lesson started and all heads turned to the teacher, but very soon everyone was travelling in their own minds, bored of what they were being told. Julie was staring outside of the window. One of her hands was resting on her leg and the other was under her chin.

"Julie?" Peter whispered hesitantly.

She spun her head to look at him and he got the chance to admire her face for a moment. That was the first time he got to see her features from such a close space. Her big beautiful blue orbits were focused on his dark ones. A curl was falling out of her messy bun and across her face, making her look so beautiful. Her skin was pale and soft, a peach color on her cheeks. Her perfume, scent of jasmine, was dazing him, making itself his favorite smell. Her lips were big and fluffy and had a color of strawberries, like they were seducing him into kissing them.

"Yes?" She whispered back.

Peter reached and his fingers curled around hers. Her whole body tensed.

"What's going on with you? You seemâ€¦distracted." His voice was warm and comforting, his lips forming a soft smile in her direction.

"I already told you, nothing's going on." She shot back. "Not that it's your business anyway."

And she pulled her hand out of his. He sighed trying to figure out what was making her so distant to everybody. Soon the school bell rang to announce the end of their first class. Julie quickly picked her things and waited impatiently for Serena and Louise. Suddenly they heard someone behind their backs insult Julie's parents. She spun around in a flash to face the owner's voice.

"What did you say?" She hissed at him like an angry cat, and Louise and Serena gave each other worried looks.

"I said your father's a murderer. He killed your mother and then ran away leaving you here all alone."

"Don't you dare to say a word against my father!" Julie felt her blood started to boil in her veins.

The boy only laughed at her face.

"Why? What can possibly a little filthy orphan like you do to me?!"

Suddenly the situation turned into a complete chaos. Julie had hit the boy and when he fell down on the floor she stretched her hands ready to curl them into fists. Serena and Louise were looking at Julie terrified begging her not to hurt the boy. Jasper and Peter stood on Julie's both sides ready to stop her if it's needed.

"Say you're sorry!" She yelled at him. "Take your nasty words back!"

"Never!" The boy yelled back.

She curled one of her hands and the boy started crying from the burning pain. Peter grabbed Julie's right hand and Jasper grabbed the left one. She started fighting with them to free her hands.

"Let me go!" She hissed at them.

Just in that moment a teacher who was passing through outside at the corridor took a look at the room and quickly ran inside. He looked at the boy on the ground whose face and hands were severely burned and then at Julie who was still trying to get free of the two boys' firm grip.

"Julie Bennett! What is going on here?!"

"Mr. Wolf, that boy said something very bad about Julie's parents andâ€¦"

"Be quiet, Peter Benjamin! Julie Bennett you're coming with me to the headmaster."

The teacher grabbed Julie by the arm pulling her outside the classroom and to the headmaster's office. The blond anxiously tried to get out of the teacher's grip, but he was too strong.

Once in the office of the headmaster the teacher told him everything.

The headmaster's name was Jeremy Masters, he was thirty years old and from what she had heard he was a man of order and discipline. Julie had crossed her hands in front of her chest ready to confront the man standing before her whatever he says.

She expected him to shout at her or punish her or do anything but the very thing he did.

"Mr. Wolf, would you please go out now? You made your point and I'd like to take it all from here."

The teacher glanced at him and went out. Mr. Masters turned to the blond, taking her hand and leading her to one of the chairs in front of his desk. He then sat next to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"I can't imagine how you must be feeling today. Actually I can, but it doesn't matter now. So, how are you? Are you holding on?"

She looked at him stunned and let her hands fall down to her legs.

"What?" She whispered, still trying to process what had happened.

"Come on, Julie, I know what day today is. Today is the day your parents disappeared one year ago. So how are you doing?"

"Not very well. Nobody seems to remember what day today is andâ€|nobody seems to care." For a moment tears seemed to sparkle in her ocean-blue eyes.

"I care." Mr. Masters said and gave her an encouraging smile.

She couldn't help but smile back.

"You shouldn't care about me and my family, butâ€|thank you."

"Your aunts, uncles and cousins love you Julie. I'm sure they care about you too. But you have to be very strong. Now take your things, go home and get some rest." And he pointed at the dark circles under her eyes. "You look like you could use a good nice sleep."

With that he stood up and went to sit behind his desk. He took something out of one of the drawers and handed it to her.

"If you ever need someone to talk to, call me."

She nodded and stood up going to the door. Before she walked out however, she turned around.

"Thank you. Thank you for the talk and for caring for me. It means a lot."

And giving a bright smile to him, she walked out of his office. Outside Louise, Serena, Peter and even Jasper were waiting for her.

"Well?" Louise asked. "What happened? Did he yell at you, did he punish you?"

They were all stunned when Julie only said, "No. He just talked to me."

"About what?"

"About the fact today's the day my parents disappeared one year ago."

With that she walked off leaving them completely shocked and mad at themselves.

How could they just forget today marked a year since the dark day
that affected all of their lives?!

End
file.